THE MASTER OF RHYTHM

TS Nandakumar has not only proved himself as a master percussionist, but the most sought after mridangam teacher as well

TS Nandakumar may not conform to most people's image of a musician. He does not have the look of the classical instrumentalist shut up in his apartment at Malad with hours and hours of riyaz. With his swarthy complexion and toothbrush beard he could pass for a businessman or a banker from the South. If you talk to him you will discover that he does not surround himself with the complexities of laya. He is a down-to-earth man, but at the same time a mridangist deeply committed to his chosen field.

Nandakumar was born in Kerala in a family of musicians. His becoming a mridangist was fortuitous. He stumbled upon a mridangam and played it. It was a moment of magic, the hour a gifted mridangist, a talented musician was born. His talent was recognised and he was thereafter sent to the well-known Kaitavana Madhavadas for his training in the gurukulavasa tradition. Even as a child and it did not take him long to win the acclaim of the pundits and the general listening public. Says Nandakumar, "Having completed my training, I came to Mumbai. For more than two decades now I have engaged myself to imparting my knowledge to young talents. My first job as a mridangam teacher was at Music Triangle, Santacruz. At present, I hold key positions in the academic staff of The Sri Shanmukhananda Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Fine Arts and Sangeeta Sabha, Sion, The Music Triangle at Santacruz, Ganakala Vidya Nilayam, Goregaon and Naadalaya at Andheri."

Nandakumar is easily the most sought after mridangam teacher in Mumbai. He has his own organisation for the promotion of the mridangam and other percussive instruments called the TSN's Percussive Arts Centre established in 1998. This is a unique organisation that aims to popularise the traditional percussive instruments among the youth. It also conducts regular classical concerts highlighting the role of percussive instruments in them. Recently, in February, The TSN's Percussive Arts Centre presented a Talavadya Kutcheri at the Sri Shanmukhananda Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Fine Arts and Sangeeta Sabha auditorium performed by Guru Nandakumar and his disciples. The programme was graced by two of India's most admired musicians, Padmashri Dr N Rajam, the violinist and Padmashri Dr N.Ramani, the flautist. Guru Nandakumar moreover has a number of audio-cassettes to his credit. His album titled 'Jewels of Rhythm' is a rhythm ensemble featuring himself and his distinguished shishyas.

Nandakumar is also the recipient of several awards and titles. Says Nandakumar, "I have been honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademy award I have also received the titles Guru Sikhamani and Sruti Laya Sudhakara conferred by Padam and The Music Triangle respectively". And considering his efforts to popularise the learning of the instrument, one wouldn't be surprised if more recognition should come his way.

Rohit Vishwanath

Teenager logs on to big league

Having bagged the Golden Web award from the International Association of Web Masters and Designers, Pranav Chaddha might have just made life easier for his fellow netizens

GIVE him the once-over and you'll count him down as just another high-school teenybopper. No way! At 15, when most lads would love to mess around with their prankish pals, Pranav Chavda has joined the big league.

The self-effacing sophomore of Bhavan's College, Andheri (W) has become the youngest Indian to launch his own internet portal that enables surfers to scan as many as four search engines in sync from the 14 on tap.

Totalsearch4u.com helps you retrieve four-fold information on any subject under the sun, thus drastically reducing precious internet time otherwise squandered on hunting for the necessary data. What's more, the site offers free e-mail, chat rooms, games, opinion polls, daily horoscopes besides handy data on business, education and jobs.

"I was browned off by the rubbish churned out by most of the search engines and hours of surfing set me back by hundreds of rupees," explains Pranav, an FYJC bookbuster who had to hammer out on his Pentium-I assembled number cruncher for six nerve-racking months till he scored a bull's eye. And this despite stumbling blocks like low bandwidth, lack of funds and high telephone call rates.

However, the self-taught net whizzo is happy that his unsung but jazzy site has registered an enviable 30,000 hits since it kicked off some three months ago. Last fortnight, totalsearch4u.com bagged the prestigious Golden Web award and soon the US-based non-non-sense International Association of Web Masters & Designers took the wonderkid under its wings, a rare honour bestowed on few Indians. In mid-February, Pranav was ranked first in the country and 54th in the world bytrainbench.com in its open-to-all 40-query skull-busting competition that had egged on 10,400 ingenious Indian cyberpunks to throw their hat into the ring.

According to Principal D B Kadam, Bhavan's College is proud of its brainy student for whom a felicitation function will be organised in the near future. No wonder, Ashok Chavda, Pranav's father and general manager of beachfront Juhu Hotel, is also ecstatic: "On his 11th birthday, I gifted him a PC. Since then he's hooked to it."

But the whiz-kid is not resting on his oars. Pranav is busy devising a novel site for SSC students that will obviate the need for joining expensive coaching classes. Also on the cards is an on-line e-school where pupils from Standard V onwards can enrol themselves and make the grade without actually having to go to school.

"This school will be government-recognised and will be affiliated to various Indian and foreign universities, with live sessions with expert teachers in a virtual classroom," reveals the genial genius who has also created, apart from the terrific totalsearch4u.com, other wondrous websites like namunasite.cjb.net, laughterindia.com and aaokhelojeeto.com.

More power to his nimble, fireball fingers!

Mahesh Trivedi

COUNSELLOR

TODAY, the number of Indians going abroad to study has increased exponentially. *Your Counsellor*, an Education Times presentation has come out with a guide to studying abroad. The magazine will be available on the stands from April 5. Following the launch of *Your Counsellor*, Education Times in association with the Western Australian Education Office will be conducting a seminar on Western Australian Information day which will be held on the 7th of April 2001 at Jacaranda, Hotel Oberoi Towers from 11am to 5pm.

This year faculty staff and representatives from seven Western Australian Institutions will be in attendance to counsel prospective students about education opportunities at their institutions.

Students are requested to carry their original and photocopies of their academic transcripts for assessment and spot offers.

Inquiries: (022) 230 3973/74

Education overseas

STUDYING ABROAD - TOEFL, A PRIMARY REQUIREMENT

Most students have traditionally ignored studying for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) since they feel it is an easy. This is something that has prevailed for a long time.

The TOEFL is compulsory for an admission to any college in America and students from English speaking backgrounds or that come from English-medium schools have traditionally felt that this is one paper they can easily crack. And, why not? The students come from a background that lends credence to their belief.

This confidence is also reflected by the position students take, while giving due importance to the requirements of colleges abroad. The requirement with most colleges, as far as the TOEFL is concerned, is in the vicinity of 240 points (this can be said to be equal to around 575 on the paper-based test of the TOEFL). Belief in this is where the saga of problems begins.

I can visualise two problems associated with this score:

1) The student is looking at a reject from the better colleges OR

2) The student is informed that his command over the language is not sufficiently proved, and that he needs to register for English as a Second Language Program.

It may come as a surprise to quite a few people that the TOEFL holds this kind of power; that it can result in an admit or a reject. The TOEFL can, in all reality, be responsible for a reject, but it cannot be a factor for an admit. Once the student has demonstrated his ability to understand spoken and written English, he is generally through. But, if the score is below the requirements of the college, then he is in for a surprise. A reject letter generally stares him in the face. And the reason is that he did not study for the exam.

The other scenario is that the student is granted an admit but, along with the letter of admit, he is sent a letter stating that the college is not too thrilled with the student's score in the test. The college may have indicated that its requirements in the TOEFL are a mere 240 but, inevitably, the student then faces the ignominy of going through coaching in English in that college. This obviously comes at a price. The student pays the college $ 2,500 per semester for the privilege of not performing well in the test! This will result in the student's budget going up by almost Rs 5,00,000 in the long run since the fees for English as a Second Language Program are not funded, and the student has to pay for this from his pocket.

It, therefore, makes sense that the student keep his vision on a higher score in the TOEFL, definitely higher than what the college had asked for. A good rule of thumb is to look at a 240+ score for admission at the undergraduate level. Aim for 250+ for admission at the graduate level. If your desire is to go to the top 20 or so colleges, then aim for 260+. Only then will the spectre of the TOEFL haunting you as a reason for a reject disappear. Aim high in the TOEFL and achieve what you had sought - admission to the best college.

Prof K P Singh
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Continued from previous page

engineering and PhD programmes in biotechnology and biomedical engineering.

The total cost of the project is estimated to be Rs 55 crore ($12 million USD). The Mehta Family Foundation is providing a donation that will support a portion of the building construction and infrastructure plus endowments and research. Officials expect the new building to be complete and fully functional by December 2002. The state-of-the-art building will house classrooms, research facilities, teaching and research laboratories.

Bhupal and Jyoti Mehta Family Foundation email: foundation@nuview.com

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